

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 00340 061018Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8469
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 0340

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, CB, H, TM
SUBJECT: CHINESE AND THE CAMBODIAN-VIENTIANESE CONFLICT

SUMMARY: DESPITE ITS MODERATE AND FAIRLY BALANCED PUBLIC
REACTION TO THE CAMBODIAN BORDER DISPUTE, THE PRC IS UN-
DOUBTEDLY DEEPLY UPSET WITH THE SRV'S PUNITIVE ACTION
AGAINST THE CAMBODIANS. THE SRV SWIPE AT A CLOSECHINESE ALLY IS
DAMAGING TO PRC PRESTIGE AND RAISES FOR IT THE SPECTER OF
VIETNAMESE EXPANSIONISM. WE EXPECT PEKING TO SEEK CLOSER
TIES WITH THAILAND ON THE BASIS OF A SHARED INTEREST IN
PRESERVING CAMBODIA'S INTEGRITY. PRC ATTITUDES TOWARD
ASEAN AND A CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN THE AREA ARE
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PAGE 02 HONG K 00340 061018Z

LIKELY TO BECOME EVEN WARMER AS PART OF ITS EFFORT
TO CONTAIN VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN THE REGION. END
SUMMARY.

1. INSTEAD OF RUNNING OUT ITS PROPAGANDA CANNON TO
SUPPORT CAMBODIA IN THE BORDER FIGHTING WITH VIETNAM,
CHINA HAS LIMITED ITSELF TO FAIRLY EVEN-HANDED PRESS

COVERAGE OF THE DISPUTE AND TO A LOW-LEVEL CALL FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BASED UPON THE FIVE PRINCIPLES. IT HAS REFRAINED EVEN FROM SUPPORTING PHNOM PENH'S CONDITION THAT SRV TROOPS MUST BE WITHDRAWN BEFORE NEGOTIATIONS.

2. PEKING'S MODERATE RESPONSE APPEARS TO BE BASED UPON SEVERAL FACTORS. A PRIMARY CONSIDERATION IS TO AVOID PUSHING THE SRV INTO THE ARMS OF THE SOVIETS. PEKING IS NOT IN A POSITION TO OFFER MUCH SUPPORT TO CAMBODIA AND A STRONGLY PRO-CAMBODIAN STANCE WOULD ONLY EXACERBATE PRESENT PRC-SRV DIFFICULTIES WITH LITTLE CHANCE OF INFLUENCING THE SITUATION.

3. IT IS ALSO CONCEIVABLE THAT THE SRV HAS CONSULTED WITH THE PRC ON THE CAMBODIAN PROBLEM AND OFFERED ASSURANCES THAT MILITARY ACTION WOULD BE LIMITED TO COUNTERING CAMBODIAN BORDER ACTIVITIES. VICE PREMIER CHI TENG-KUEI'S TEN-DAY VISIT TO CAMBODIA IN EARLY DECEMBER AND THE PRC VISITS OF LE DUAN AND HOANG VAN HOAN IN RECENT MONTHS SUGGEST PRC-SRV DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY ON THE BORDER DISPUTE. (THE SOVIETS APPARENTLY KNEW AS EARLY AS NOVEMBER (1976 HONG KONG 15206) THAT THE VIETNAMESE HAD PLANS FOR DEALING WITH THE BORDER PROBLEM.)

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PAGE 03 HONG K 00340 061018Z

4. DESPITE ITS MODERATE RESPONSE, PEKING IS UNDOUBTEDLY DEEPLY UPSET WITH THE SRV ACTION. HANOI'S ATTACK ON AN ALLY WEAKENS CHINA'S PRESTIGE AND ALSO RAISES THE SPECTER OF VIETNAMESE EXPANSION IN THE AREA. THESE CONCERNS PROBABLY ACCOUNT FOR EXISTING CHINESE EFFORTS TO DRAW CAMBODIA OUT OF ITS ISOLATION AND DEVELOP A MEASURE OF REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR PHNOM PENH. THEY WILL PROBABLY ENCOURAGE THE PRC TO SEEK FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THAILAND (WITH PEKING POSSIBLY PUSHING CAMBODIA TO DO THE SAME) ON THE BASIS OF A SHARED INTEREST IN PRESERVING CAMBODIA AS A BUFFER TO VIETNAMESE EXPANSION. WE WOULD ALSO EXPECT PEKING TO DRAW STILL CLOSER TO ASEAN AND POSSIBLY BECOME MORE FORTHRIGHT IN WELCOMING CONTINUED U.S. INFLUENCE IN THE REGION AS AN OFFSET TO THE VIETNAMESE.
SHOESMITH

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